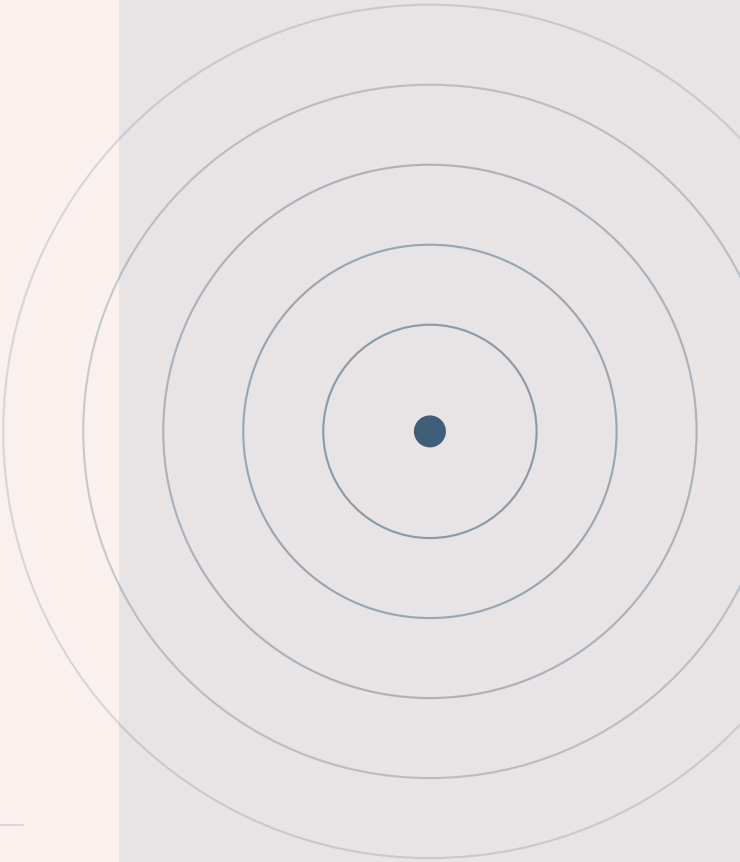
WHITEPAPER

Leading Through Change

Practical Strategies for Guiding Teams Through Growth, Restructuring, and Transition



For people managers, senior leaders, and HR, enablement, and change leaders who want to help their teams move through change with clarity, confidence, and care.

RESOURCE LIBRARY
Tools to Accelerate Your Growth

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Change is constant. How we lead through it is a choice.

Organizations rarely struggle because a strategy was poorly chosen. More often, they struggle because the people expected to live it were not brought along.

Every growing organization moves through seasons of change: rapid scaling, restructuring, new leadership, new systems, and new ways of working. Each brings opportunity, and each places real demands on the people doing the work. Plans, timelines, and org charts describe *what* will change. Whether that change actually takes hold depends on how individuals experience it, day by day, through the conversations they have with their leaders.

This whitepaper offers a practical, people-centered approach for leaders at every level. It is built on a simple premise: **managers are the most important lever an organization has during change.** They translate strategy into meaning, notice concerns early, and reinforce new behaviors long after the announcement is over.

Inside, you will find

- Why change efforts stall, and what the people side of change requires of leaders.
- Distinct guidance for three common scenarios: **growth**, **restructuring**, and **transition**.
- A five-phase leader's framework: **Prepare → Communicate → Equip → Reinforce → Sustain**.
- Ready-to-use tools: a communication plan, talking points for difficult conversations, a resistance guide, adoption indicators, and a change-readiness checklist.

> *"A change announcement is a moment. Adoption is a hundred small conversations that follow it.*

How to use this guide

Read it end to end before a major change, or go straight to the tool you need. The framework and checklists are designed to be adapted: bring them to leadership team meetings, use them in manager briefings, and revisit them as the change matures.

THE CHALLENGE

Why change efforts stall

Most change efforts do not fail at the moment of decision. They lose momentum quietly, in the gap between what leaders announce and what people do differently.

The people side of change

Every organizational change is ultimately a collection of individual changes. A new structure only works when people adopt new reporting lines, decision rights, and habits. A new system only delivers value when people use it consistently and well. Leaders who focus on the technical side of change (the design, the budget, the plan) while underinvesting in the human side often see the same patterns emerge.

Common stall point	What it looks like
Clarity gaps	People hear *what* is changing but not *why*, or what it means for them personally.
Leadership that goes quiet	Visible sponsorship fades after launch, signaling that the change is no longer a priority.
Managers left out of the loop	Managers learn about changes at the same time as their teams and cannot answer questions credibly.
Skills lag behind expectations	People are asked to work differently before they have the knowledge or practice to succeed.
Old systems reward old habits	Goals, metrics, and recognition still point to the previous way of working.
Unaddressed loss	Leaders move straight to the future without acknowledging what people are leaving behind.

The manager as the critical lever

Employees tend to look first to their direct manager to understand how a change affects them. Senior leaders explain the case for change at the organizational level; managers make it real at the team level. They are positioned to:

- **Translate** enterprise messages into what matters for each role and team.
- **Listen** for concerns, confusion, and early signs of resistance before they harden.
- **Coach** people through new skills and behaviors, one conversation at a time.
- **Reinforce** progress through recognition, feedback, and consistent expectations.

Yet managers are often experiencing the same change themselves. Equipping them early, with context, tools, and support, is one of the highest-leverage investments a change leader can make.

THREE SCENARIOS

Different changes, different demands

Each type of change creates a distinct emotional landscape. Effective leaders recognize which one they are in and adapt their approach.

01 · GROWTH

Scaling the team and the business

How it often feels: energizing but stretching. New colleagues arrive quickly, roles blur, and what worked for a small team starts to strain.

Leadership focus: preserve what makes the culture work while building the structure that scale requires.

- Make the implicit explicit: document decision rights, norms, and ways of working.
- Invest in onboarding so new hires and long-tenured staff build shared context.
- Clarify how roles will evolve, including which responsibilities are being handed off.
- Develop first-time managers early; growth often moves strong individual contributors into leadership.

Watch for: burnout among early team members, diluted priorities, and long-tenured employees who feel overlooked.

02 · RESTRUCTURING

Reorganizing teams and roles

How it often feels: unsettling. Even people whose roles are unaffected may feel uncertain about their future, relationships, and standing.

Leadership focus: lead with honesty, fairness, and dignity, and rebuild stability as quickly as responsibly possible.

- Share what you know, what you don't yet know, and when you expect to know more.
- Explain the rationale and decision criteria, within legal and policy guidance.
- Treat departing colleagues with respect; those who stay are watching closely.
- Re-establish clarity fast: team charters, priorities, and working relationships.

Watch for: rumor filling information gaps, "survivor" disengagement, and high performers quietly exploring other options.

03 · TRANSITION

New leaders, systems, or roles

How it often feels: disorienting. Familiar routines, relationships, and sources of expertise are disrupted, even when the change is welcome.

Leadership focus: help people let go of the old, navigate the in-between, and build confidence in the new.

- New leaders: listen first, learn the history, and be explicit about what will and won't change.
- New systems: pair training with hands-on practice, peer champions, and patience.
- New roles: clarify expectations, success measures, and where to go for help.
- Acknowledge that productivity may dip temporarily while skills build.

Watch for: workarounds that keep old processes alive and lost confidence among experts in the old way.

Grounding your approach in established models

Prosci ADKAR® Model

Individual change. Five outcomes a person needs to change: Awareness, Desire, Knowledge, Ability, and Reinforcement.

Kotter's 8-Step Model

Organizational change. A sequence from creating urgency and building a guiding coalition to generating short-term wins and anchoring change in culture.

Bridges' Transition Model

Psychological transition. Separates external change from internal transition: an Ending, the Neutral Zone, and a New Beginning.

THE FRAMEWORK

A leader's change framework

Five phases that keep the human side of change in view from first planning conversation to lasting habit. The phases overlap in practice; treat them as a rhythm rather than a rigid sequence.

01 Prepare → 02 Communicate → 03 Equip → 04 Reinforce → 05 Sustain

Phase	Purpose	Key leader actions
01 Prepare	Understand the change and its impact before you speak about it.	Clarify the why, the scope, and what success looks like. Map which groups are affected and how. Brief managers before their teams. Anticipate questions and concerns.
02 Communicate	Build understanding and a reason to engage.	Explain the reason for the change and the cost of standing still. Share what is known and unknown. Use multiple channels and repeat key messages. Create space for two-way dialogue.
03 Equip	Give people the knowledge, skills, and resources to succeed.	Provide role-specific training and practice time. Offer job aids and clear points of contact. Identify peer champions. Remove barriers that make the new way harder than the old.
04 Reinforce	Make the new behaviors stick.	Recognize early adopters and visible progress. Give specific, timely feedback. Align goals, metrics, and incentives to the new way of working. Address workarounds openly.
05 Sustain	Embed the change into how the organization runs.	Build the change into onboarding, processes, and performance conversations. Track adoption over time. Capture lessons learned. Retire old tools and practices deliberately.

> *"People rarely resist change itself. They resist uncertainty, loss, and being left out of the conversation. Each phase is a chance to reduce all three.*

MAKING IT STICK

Manager-led behavior change and reinforcement

Lasting change happens when new behaviors become routine. Managers shape routines more directly than anyone else in the organization.

Core manager practices

01 **Connect the change to the work.**
Show each person how the change shows up in their role, their goals, and their week. Abstract strategy becomes meaningful when it is specific.

02 **Model the behaviors you are asking for.**
If the team is adopting a new tool or process, use it visibly. Inconsistency from leaders is quickly noticed and copied.

03 **Hold regular check-ins on the change.**
Make it a standing topic in one-on-ones and team meetings: What is working? Where are you stuck? What would help?

04 **Coach, don't just communicate.**
Pair expectations with support: practice time, shadowing, and constructive feedback as skills develop.

05 **Recognize progress, not just results.**
Early in a change, acknowledge effort, learning, and experimentation. Name specific behaviors so others know what good looks like.

06 **Escalate barriers quickly.**
When a process, system, or policy makes the new way harder, raise it. Removing obstacles builds credibility.

A simple reinforcement rhythm

Cadence	Reinforcement practice
Weekly	Brief team huddle on the change: one update, one win, one open question.
Every one-on-one	A few minutes on how the person is experiencing the change and what support they need.
Monthly	Review adoption signals with your team; celebrate progress and agree on one improvement.
Quarterly	Step back with peers and leadership: what has stuck, what has slipped, and what to adjust.

COMMUNICATION PLANNING

Building a communication plan

Good change communication is planned, sequenced, and two-way. Adapt this template to your change.

Audience	Key message	Channel	Timing	Owner
Senior leadership team	The case for change, decisions required, and their role as visible sponsors.	Working session	Before any announcement	Executive sponsor
People managers	What is changing and why, impact on their teams, talking points, and where to escalate questions.	Manager briefing + toolkit	Shortly before the broad announcement	Change lead / HR
Directly affected employees	What it means for them personally, what support is available, and next steps.	One-on-one or small group conversation	First, before or alongside broad news	Direct manager
All employees	The why, the what, the expected timeline, and how to ask questions.	All-hands + written FAQ	Announcement day	Executive sponsor
Cross-functional partners	Changes to processes, contacts, or handoffs that affect how teams work together.	Email + partner meetings	Within the first week	Functional leads
External stakeholders (if relevant)	Any change to service, contacts, or experience, and continuity reassurances.	Account outreach / notice	Coordinated with internal news	Customer-facing leads
All audiences (ongoing)	Progress updates, early wins, answers to recurring questions, and what's next.	Newsletter, team meetings	Ongoing, through adoption	Change lead + managers

Principles for change communication

- **Sequence matters.** People most affected should hear first, and from their manager where possible.
- **Repeat with purpose.** A message heard once is rarely absorbed. Reinforce it across channels and over time.
- **Be honest about uncertainty.** “We don't know yet, and here's when we will” builds more trust than silence.
- **Make it two-way.** Create real opportunities for questions, and close the loop on what you heard.

DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS

Talking points for difficult conversations

These are starting points, not scripts. Adapt them to your voice, your relationship with the person, and the specifics of the change. Always coordinate sensitive conversations with HR.

Explaining why the change is happening	*"I want to share what's changing, why we're doing it, and what it means for our team."* *"The decision reflects where the business needs to go. I'll be clear about what's decided and what is still open."*
When you don't have all the answers	*"I don't know that yet. I'll find out, and I'll come back to you by [date]."* *"Here's what I can tell you today, and here's what is still being worked through."*
When someone is upset or anxious	*"That's a completely understandable reaction. Tell me more about what's on your mind."* *"You don't have to have it all figured out today. Let's talk about what would help right now."*
When someone's role is changing	*"Your role is changing in these specific ways. Let's walk through what stays the same, too."* *"Let's agree on what success looks like in the first 30 days and the support you'll need."*
When someone disagrees with the decision	*"I appreciate you being candid. What concerns you most?"* *"The direction is set, but how we implement it is something your input can genuinely shape."*

Before, during, and after the conversation

Before: know the facts, the support available, and what you can and cannot share. **During:** lead with the headline, then listen more than you speak. Acknowledge emotion without rushing to fix it. **After:** follow up within a few days, and keep any commitments you made.

Phrases to avoid: "This won't affect you" (unless you are certain), "It's not my decision" (it distances you from the change), and "Everyone just needs to get on board" (it dismisses legitimate concerns).

RESISTANCE

Recognizing and responding to resistance

Resistance is a natural, human response to change, and often a source of useful information. Treat it as a signal to understand rather than an obstacle to overcome.

What you may see	What it may mean	How to respond
Repeated questions about the rationale	The why hasn't landed, or people don't find it credible.	Revisit the case for change with specifics. Invite questions and answer them directly.
Quiet compliance, low energy	Uncertainty, fatigue, or a sense of loss that hasn't been acknowledged.	Check in one-on-one. Name what is being left behind. Ask what would help.
Workarounds and reverting to old ways	Gaps in skills, tools, or confidence; or the old way is still easier.	Offer practice and support. Find and remove the barriers that make the new way harder.
Vocal criticism	Strong concerns, sometimes about real risks the plan has missed.	Listen carefully. Separate valid risks from discomfort. Act on what you learn and say so.
Rising absenteeism or attrition signals	Deep uncertainty about the future or erosion of trust.	Increase transparency and connection. Partner with HR on support and retention conversations.

A diagnostic lens

Prosci's ADKAR Model offers a practical way to locate the source of resistance. Ask which element is missing for the person or group:

Awareness	Do they understand why the change is needed?
Desire	Do they want to participate and support it?
Knowledge	Do they know how to change?
Ability	Can they demonstrate the new skills and behaviors?
Reinforcement	Is something in place to sustain the change?

Focusing your response on the specific missing element is usually more effective than repeating the same message more loudly.

WELL-BEING & TRUST

Supporting well-being and trust during uncertainty

Change asks people to invest energy while the ground is still shifting. Leaders who protect well-being and trust help their teams stay steady enough to adapt.

Bridges' Transition Model reminds leaders that people move through their own internal transition at different speeds, from letting go of the old, through an uncertain in-between, toward a new beginning. Support looks different at each stage.

Stage	How leaders can help
Ending: letting go	Acknowledge what is ending and why it mattered. Allow space for mixed feelings. Honor past contributions.
The neutral zone	Provide short-term goals, frequent check-ins, and temporary structures. Encourage experimentation and expect some disorientation.
New beginning	Clarify roles and purpose. Celebrate early successes. Connect the new way of working to a shared future.

Protecting well-being

- Be realistic about workload; reprioritize rather than simply adding.
- Point people to available support resources, such as an employee assistance program, if your organization offers one.
- Notice changes in behavior or energy and check in privately.
- Model a sustainable pace and healthy boundaries yourself.

Building and preserving trust

- Say what you know, what you don't, and when you'll know more.
- Keep commitments, especially small ones like follow-up dates.
- Be consistent: the same message in every room.
- Create safe ways to raise concerns, and respond without defensiveness.

> *"Trust lives in the gap between what leaders say and what they do. During change, people watch that gap closely.*

MEASUREMENT

Measuring adoption and change success

What gets measured gets attention. Track both early signals that adoption is on course and the longer-term outcomes the change was meant to deliver.

LEADING INDICATORS

Early signals: are people engaging?

- Participation in briefings, training, and Q&A sessions
- Training completion and demonstrated proficiency
- Usage of new tools, processes, or workflows
- Volume and themes of questions and concerns raised
- Pulse survey sentiment on clarity, confidence, and support
- Manager check-ins held on the change

LAGGING INDICATORS

Outcomes: did the change deliver?

- Sustained adoption over time, with old methods retired
- Achievement of the business outcomes in the case for change
- Productivity, quality, or service levels returning to or exceeding baseline
- Retention, particularly of key talent
- Engagement trends in affected teams
- Speed of execution against the original plan

Measurement tips

- **Set a baseline** before the change so you can see real movement.
- **Define "adopted"** in observable terms: what will people be doing, how often, and how well?
- **Combine numbers with stories.** Data shows where; conversations explain why.
- **Share results transparently** and use them to adjust, not to assign blame.
- **Keep measuring after go-live.** Many changes slip once attention moves elsewhere.

READINESS CHECKLIST

Change-readiness checklist

Use this checklist with your leadership team before launch and again at key milestones. Any unchecked item is a prompt for a conversation, not necessarily a reason to delay.

CLARITY & SPONSORSHIP	
☐	The reason for the change can be explained in two or three sentences.
☐	Success has been defined, with measures and a baseline.
☐	Senior sponsors are aligned and committed to visible, ongoing involvement.
PEOPLE & IMPACT	
☐	Affected groups have been identified and the impact on each is understood.
☐	Likely concerns and sources of resistance have been anticipated.
☐	Well-being and support resources have been identified.
MANAGERS	
☐	Managers are briefed before their teams.
☐	Managers have talking points, FAQs, and a clear escalation path.
☐	Managers have support for their own experience of the change.
COMMUNICATION	
☐	A communication plan covers audiences, messages, channels, timing, and owners.
☐	There are channels for two-way feedback, and a plan to respond.
CAPABILITY & REINFORCEMENT	
☐	Training, practice time, and job aids are in place.
☐	Goals, metrics, and recognition align with the new way of working.
☐	Adoption will be tracked, reviewed, and acted on over time.

CONCLUSION

Leading forward

Change will keep coming. The organizations that thrive are not the ones that avoid disruption, but the ones whose leaders guide people through it with clarity and care.

Whether your organization is scaling, restructuring, or navigating a transition, the fundamentals hold: explain the why, equip managers early, communicate honestly and often, give people the skills and support they need, and reinforce the new way of working until it becomes simply the way things are done.

Next steps

1. **Name the change.** Identify which scenario you are in (growth, restructuring, or transition) and what it asks of your team.
2. **Run the readiness checklist.** Bring it to your next leadership meeting and agree on owners for any gaps.
3. **Equip your managers.** Brief them first and share the talking points and communication plan in this guide.
4. **Build in reinforcement.** Establish a check-in rhythm and decide how you will track adoption.
5. **Revisit and adjust.** Review progress at regular milestones and adapt your approach based on what you learn.

Further reading

- Kotter, John P. *Leading Change.* Harvard Business Review Press.
- Bridges, William, and Susan Bridges. *Managing Transitions: Making the Most of Change.*
- Hiatt, Jeffrey M. *ADKAR: A Model for Change in Business, Government and Our Community.* Prosci.
- Heath, Chip, and Dan Heath. *Switch: How to Change Things When Change Is Hard.*
- Edmondson, Amy C. *The Fearless Organization: Creating Psychological Safety in the Workplace for Learning, Innovation, and Growth.*

This whitepaper provides general guidance and is not legal advice. For changes affecting employment terms, consult your HR, legal, and employee relations partners.